

disparities. Comparable measurement of regional trends should be carried out for Korea, Taiwan and other Asian countries. In a similar vein, Bae-Goon Park and Josh Lepawsky examine development zones in Malaysia and South Korea, recently set up in order to attract foreign and domestic capital through tax exceptions and access to grants. They call this approach “spatially selective liberalization.” But I wonder how different this is in principle from the earlier generation of “export processing zones,” which also used similar incentives to attract assembly-oriented manufacturing for export.

This book provides many insights into transformations of social and economic policy making in the East Asian region. Change in these societies, as elsewhere, reflects a political struggle between those who welcome the reform of developmental-oriented regimes and their bureaucratic regulations, and those who resist these changes. This suggests that further research might focus more on the reaction of neoliberal inroads by both capital and civil society. For instance, has Western neoliberalism been resisted by entrenched capitalists or welcomed by nascent entrepreneurs in East Asia? Why has this region not yet thrown up a Steve Jobs or Bill Gates? All told, the editors are to be commended for grappling with an ambitiously diverse topic and for synthesizing various scholars’ pieces on a wide sample of countries and topics in their introduction and conclusion chapters. This book will prove interesting to geographers, analysts of urban and regional restructuring, and enthusiasts of political and social theory.

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CHINA’S EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS: Beyond Economic Transformation. *Cheng Li, editor. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010. xviii, 396 pp. (Tables, graphs.) US\$34.95, paper. ISBN: 978-0-8157-0405-8.*

While rising disposable incomes in China may be confined to a relatively small proportion of the population, they generate excitement in scholarly circles and in the business press. Speculation on the economic and political impact of this growing force of consumers is central to the “China rising” story. This book provides a comprehensive overview of recent research on the emerging “middle class” in China, bringing together work by scholars inside and outside China on the subject. The volume is based on a program of research by the Brookings Institution that culminated in a conference in 2009.

As the book’s editor Cheng Li points out in two chapters surveying the field in general and the work of Chinese scholars in particular, sociologists in China have been at the forefront of identifying and studying class groupings they identify as “middle class.” The level of interest can be gauged by the

fact that over 100 scholarly books had been published on the subject in Chinese by 2010. By contrast, many academics outside the PRC are still cautious about using the term “middle class” in reference to mainland China, not least because of its association with the class structure of liberal capitalist economies. In contrast to assumptions that the middle class would spearhead demands for democratization and liberalization, some Chinese scholars have argued that it could be a stabilizing force for society and economy. Their normative claims have been incorporated in different ways into official policy, as building a middle class has become an explicit aim of the Communist Party, evident in former Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” doctrine, for example.

The level of scholarly interest in the middle class in China has not resulted in consensus on definitions. Studies based on large-scale census and survey research come up with different conceptions of what constitutes “the middle class,” its size and varying predictions about its potential for developing the sense of historical mission seen as crucial to its political role elsewhere. Definitions based on income and consumption, favoured by government and policy makers, point to a much smaller proportion of the population than those based on occupation, generally adopted by sociologists. Li Chunling, one of the scholars who has spearheaded this latter approach and presents her findings in this volume, cautions that aggregate figures conceal a great deal of variation, and qualitative research is needed to contextualize the numbers. Furthermore, Chinese scholars have also pointed out that “middle class” remains an aspirational category as much as a reality. For example, Lu Hanlong’s chapter explores the particular dynamics of the middle class as an ideological project in the China context. He shows how the state’s objective of achieving “*xiaokang*” (moderate prosperity) involves encouraging competitive materialism, while the continued existence of a state distribution system that limits equal access to political and economic resources perpetuates inequalities in various dimensions. In a chapter that situates China’s reform process in the context of globalization, Zhou Xiaohong and Qin Chen argue that the role of the state in facilitating the rise of a consumerist middle class is central to understanding its character as a “vanguard” in consumption and a “rearguard” in politics (85).

Parts 2 and 3 of the book focus on Chinese debates and definitional issues, while part 4 contains chapters on housing and education, both key components in the formation of a middle class. Part 6 looks at particular occupational groups and their political attitudes, including lawyers and entrepreneurs. Chapters in part 1 and part 2 situate these developments in comparative perspective, setting the research on the middle class in the context of global and regional trends. A chapter by Homi Kharas and Geoffrey Gertz argues that the rise of income and consumption levels in China is part of a global expansion that is bringing a sizable proportion of the world’s population into the middle class. Increasing consumption among this group

is, they assert, key to prosperity both in China and elsewhere, optimistically asserting that middle-class demands for a cleaner environment will mitigate the potential damage of such trends.

Two chapters that provide regional comparative perspective, Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao's on the Asia-Pacific and Han Sang-Jin's comparing activism in South Korea and China, show that homogeneity in middle-income groups should not be assumed. Fractions of the middle classes in Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines formed alliances with other class forces to push for democratization. Hsiao points out that claims about the political conservatism of the middle class in mainland China may be as much a political project as based on a realistic assessment of opinions and potential for action, highlighting the situational and contingent character of the emergence of radical segments among middle-income groups. Han's analysis is similar, emphasizing that "there seems no compelling reason to believe that the sociopolitical attitudes and practical capacities for action are divided by such objective variables as occupation or income" (265).

The situational character of attitudes is demonstrated in Luigi Tomba's fascinating chapter comparing the "housing effect" in three different parts of China, Beijing, Shenyang and Guangdong. His research shows the varying outcomes of local housing policies on the relationship of middle-income groups to the local state and to local elites. He concludes, "The social distinctions that characterize the emergence of China's middle class are ... a complex construction involving the agency of governments, private actors, and economic communities" in which housing has been a central factor (212). While such a complex view militates against overall (and overly neat) judgments about the state of "the middle class," accounts that bring in both the local and the transnational are needed if analysis of the impact of the changes occurring in China are to avoid falling back into implicit modernization theory. The emergence of a "middle class" is simultaneously a story about local political economies, local and national political projects, and local, national and global imaginaries. Some parts of this book take on these elements, but overall it tends toward a "methodological nationalism" that is not always the most effective approach to illuminating its subject matter, in the view of this reader.

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